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ABSTRACT

A committee was appointed in March 1978 to investigate feasible alternatives to the existing card catalog at Northwestern University Library; this interim report reviews the committee's activities and recommendations, identifies tasks still to be completed, and describes the status of a proposed online successor to the card catalog. Ten concerns related to the online catalog are discussed: (1) the need for a public services liaison, (2) the question of closing or freezing the card catalog, (3) alternative formats for the continuation catalog, (4) inclusiveness of the online catalog, (5) conversion of cross references, (6) maintenance of the database, (7) index enhancements, (8) backup for the online catalog, (9) staff and user training, and (10) evaluation. Some additional concerns are briefly reviewed, as well as the current status of the project. (SW)

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Alternatives to the Card Catalog Committee
Northwestern University Library

Interim Report:

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Review of Recommendations
Status of Developments

* * *

July 14, 1980

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Submitted to:
--John McGowan, University Librarian
--Administrative Committee

Prepared by:
--Janet Swan Hill, Chair, ACCC

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ALTERNATIVES TO THE CARD CATALOG: COMMITTEE REPORT

In March 1978 the University Librarian, John McGowan, appointed an ad hoc committee to "investigate feasible successors to the existing card catalog, assuming the use of the NOTIS (Northwestern Online Total Integrated System) database as it presently [existed] or as it might be augmented." The Committee consisted of ten staff members drawn from seven departments, including two branch libraries. The chair was held by Sandy Whiteley of Reference. Membership has changed somewhat since 1978 and now consists of:

Janet Swan Hill, Chair (Catalog)
Joanne Boelke, ex officio (NOTIS 3 Instruction Manual Task Force) (Undergraduate Services)
Ree DeDonato (Reference)
Elisabeth Janakiev (Catalog)
Marion McMahon (Copy Cataloging)
Linda Malcolm (Catalog Management)
Richard Olson (Collection Management)
Charlotte Shemin (Science Engineering Library)
Charles Simpson (Music Library)
Velma Veneziano (Information Systems Development Office)

By May a a list of preliminary recommendations and subjects needing attention were presented. In October the Committee divided itself into subcommittees and drew into these groups additional staff. Each subcommittee was chaired by a member of the ACCC. Subcommittees and their current Chairs are:

Authority Control (Elisabeth Janakiev)
Backup Catalog (Marion McMahon)
Bibliographic Access (Janet Hill)
Bibliographic Display (Charles Simpson)
Branch and Departmental Libraries (Linda Malcolm)
Remodeling and Equipment (Richard Olson)
User Education (Ree DeDonato)
User Response (Charlotte Shemin)

In March 1979 the ACCC submitted a second report to the Librarian including both firm recommendations and discussions of topics which the Committee felt needed to be studied. The Alternatives Committee is now two years old and the test version of the on-line catalog (LUIS: Library User Information System) has just just "gone public". Now, therefore, is an appropriate time to review the Committee's activities and recommendations, to list things which remain to be done, and to describe the status of the proposed "successor to the ... card catalog".

I. LIAISON FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

One of the first conclusions reached by the the Committee was that there was a need for a Public Services staff member to serve as liaison with the Information Systems Development Office (ISDO) in the same way that the Coordinator for Automation Procedures serves Technical Services. It was further recommended that this or some other individual be given the task of preparing a NOTIS 3 user's manual for staff.

II. CLOSING OR FREEZING THE CARD CATALOGS

After studying the costs of maintaining the card catalogs and investigating possible effects of AACR 2, the ACCC recommended that the main Author-Title and Subject catalogs be closed simultaneously with LC's Official Catalog and that branch and departmental library catalogs be frozen at the same time. Closing was defined as having no new catalog cards filed, but being subject to correction through withdrawal of incorrect cards. Freezing was defined as having no new cards filed, and not being subject to correction through alteration or withdrawal of incorrect or obsolete cards. The rationale for different procedures being employed for main and branch catalogs was based on staffing and operational considerations, as well as on the size, comprehensiveness, and location of the main catalogs.

III. ALTERNATIVE FORMATS FOR THE CONTINUATION CATALOGS

The Committee concluded that the best format for a new catalog was on-line (i.e. a catalog accessed directly through a CRT (Cathode Ray Tube) computer terminal). Northwestern is in an enviable position in this respect since its advanced computer system makes introduction of such a catalog feasible. Other libraries planning or implementing COM or card continuations for their catalogs have been almost unanimous in stating that an on-line catalog is their ultimate goal, even if not a present possibility.

The ACCC recognized that even NOTIS cannot offer complete replacement for card catalogs immediately, and that limitations which have nothing to do with the system may also result in the online option being delayed for the main Subject Catalog as well as for author-title and subject catalogs in branch libraries and collections. These catalogs should be closed at the same time as the main Author-Title Catalog, but may have to be continued by temporary "add-on" card catalogs until subject access is tested and until enough terminals are available.

IV. INCLUSIVENESS OF THE ON-LINE CATALOG

A major advantage of an on-line catalog is that it can include records for all items on the database and display all access points normally indexed. Thus main and added entries for items cataloged by Garrett, Transportation, Music, Health Sciences, Law, etc. can be incorporated into the central file. This is a considerable improvement over the card catalog where few if any cards for these items may be filed. There are, however, many groups of materials presently represented in the card catalog which are not on the database, and for which plans must be made. The ACCC identified the largest categories of these materials so that their treatment could be considered. Included are: Northwestern dissertations; purchased catalog cards for items in microform sets; form cards for works in Government Publications; and cross references.

Other classes of materials are not represented either in the card catalog or on the database. The ACCC recommended that studies be made of the feasibility of including them in NOTIS. These include maps, government documents, and RAND reports. A different problem is presented by items which are on NOTIS but not in the card catalogs. Most of these materials, such as pieces received but returned, desk copies, etc., should be excluded from the public catalog. Other information, such as check-in data for unbound periodicals might well be included. Arguments for or against inclusion of other types of records, such as those received but not yet in the Catalog Dept., or serial records for monographic series classed separately, were recognized.

The ACCC did not make recommendations for all types of records identified. Instead it urged that their inclusion be thoroughly discussed and plans made prior to opening the on-line catalog.

V. CROSS REFERENCES

Cross references are crucial to the usability of a catalog. References are derived from authority records prepared in the course of cataloging and are not yet part of the NOTIS database, although the authorities format has been "brought up" on the system. A project has begun to convert name authority records to machine readable form, but the job is large and even though NOTIS will accept input of authority data, cross references do no yet display in the indexes. The Committee recommended that authority conversion be given high priority and that an effort be made to provide as many references as possible prior to the closing of the card catalogs. Included in the recommendation were SEE and SEE ALSO references for names, series, and uniform titles, as well as general references (e.g. Mc SEE ALSO Mac) and "form card" references (e.g. For publications of this organization not listed in this catalog, consult the Government Publications Department).

Although subject authority records can also be input, the ACCC recommended that NUL not attempt to provide a subject thesaurus "in-house," but should try to use LC's Subject Heading database whenever it becomes available.

VI. CORRECTION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE DATABASE

NOTIS currently contains various types of records and index entries which may be confusing. These can be variously attributed to conversion of records from NOTIS 2 to NOTIS 3, duplicate entries, shortcomings of MARC formats, revision of headings, and a variety of other exigencies. The ACCC asked that problem materials be identified and dealt with as much as possible before the public gained access to the online catalog.

VII. INDEX ENHANCEMENTS

Current indexes to NOTIS have served Library staff well since 1977, although a number of problems have been noted. While it is possible to expect staff to cope with system idiosyncracies, the same standards cannot be set for the Library's public. The Committee recommended that an analysis of the indexes be made with the aim of making them as simple to use as possible. Special mention was made of the desirability of two-line index entries, and of re-examining index displays for uniform titles. It was again noted that cross references should be incorporated into the database, and that uniform title headings should be displayed in response to both author and title searches.

It was stressed that a number of problems might be caused by the infrequency of index regeneration. Presently authors and titles are updated immediately but other entries are indexed only after regeneration. Further, while a corrected heading appears on the index immediately after input, the old form also remains in the index until regeneration. The ACCC recommended that indexes be regenerated more frequently once the on-line catalog is open. It was felt that an off-line update for all entries would be acceptable if that were the price of frequent regeneration of secondary entries.

There was discussion of whether a dictionary index arrangement would be desirable, but the matter was tabled pending development of subject access. Also discussed were the virtues and problems of a union catalog. It was agreed that union access would probably best serve the greatest number of users, but that maintenance of a union catalog is complicated and will ultimately require more than expressions of good will from inputting agencies.

VIII. BACKUP FOR THE ON-LINE CATALOG

COM (probably fiche) appeared to be the obvious choice for a backup catalog. It has its drawbacks, however, and the ACCC urged careful consideration before installing a COM backup system. COM catalogs are not inexpensive, either in terms of equipment or in production of film. Other libraries' experiences with COM have indicated that frequent cumulation is desirable, thus adding to the cost. The Committee was also concerned about introducing two new technologies to NUL users at the same time. Rather than recommending immediate use of COM the ACCC suggested that the card catalog itself be the backup for the test period and for the first months after the catalog is closed. The amount of downtime which may be experienced can then be determined, and informed judgement made on how elaborate the backup needs to be. Since our RLIN terminals should be delivered during this period, we will also be able to assess the usefulness of RLIN as a backup for those times when our own computer is down but a general power failure does not force the Library to close.

IX. STAFF AND USER EDUCATION

The ACCC recommended that all staff be trained to use the new catalog, and that user instruction be incorporated into library tours. The Subcommittee on User Education was designated to develop instructional materials and propose training methods, and as soon as the committment was made to "bring up" the user system that Subcommittee sprang into action. Basic instructional materials were ready when the catalog officially opened on May 5, 1980, and staff training, especially for those who volunteered to help at the Information Desk, had been given.

X. EVALUATION

The ACCC recognized several levels for appraisal of the new catalog. The first would help in planning LUIS modifications during the test phase. The next level would be longer term and would consider such things as the number and location of terminals, possible future enhancements to the system, etc. The ACCC felt that both of these types of evaluation were within the capabilities of present staff, although faculty assistance would be desirable, especially for the second level. The third type of evaluation would be more formal and theoretical, looking into matters such as how patron use of an on-line file differs from use of the card catalog, differences in perceptions of the catalog or the Library, etc. This type of effort is almost certainly beyond the Library's present capacity. Ideally, it should be carried out by experienced researchers working over a long period of time, and will probably require outside funding support.

XI. OTHER CONCERNS

Other topics not easily subsumed under a general heading were discussed and recommendations made. These included:

1. Subject Access

It was clear that subject searching of the on-line catalog would not be available as early as author and title access. The Committee recommended that the main Subject Catalog close at the same time as the Author-Title Catalog, and be continued by an add-on card catalog until on-line subject searching is developed. This recommendation was made in the interest of not subjecting user to two new technologies at the same time, and with the understanding that if AACR 2-based changes to subject headings were few, an effort would be made to continue an integrated subject catalog (rather than an add-on) until online subject searching is available.

Since present indexes to NOTIS's LCAT and LODR include only "descriptive" entries, Library staff have had little experience with on-line subject searching and thus do not have years'-worth of suggestions to make. Published literature suggests that methods of narrowing a subject search are useful in a subject retrieval system, and that sophisticated searching strategies are theoretically possible. The Committee recommended that the feasibility of providing various types of subject access be investigated, but that immediate attention be given to the development of a first generation subject searching system to be available prior to Day One. A separate suggestion was made for display of titles in reverse chronological order.

Since the the original subject recommendations were made, NUL has joined the Research Libraries Group (RLG) and become a part of the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) which has an extremely sophisticated subject searching component. Experience using RLIN's subject capabilities may enable us to make better decisions about the complexity we ultimately need in our own system.

2. Shelflist conversion

Considerations which make closing the Author-Title and Subject Catalogs imperative do not affect the Shelflist. The Committee recommended that the Shelflist remain open until it can be converted to machine readable form.

3. Retrospective conversion of the card catalog

Conversion of the entire catalog to machine readable form is an expensive dream. Currently more than 2,000 titles are being converted each year as records are handled for other reasons, and funds for systematic conversion of segments of the collections may be available in the future. The Committee recommended that a study be made to determine the best approaches for converting existing manual cataloging. One possibility for retrospective

conversion is the use of a commercial vendor. The Library has recently been contacted by one such firm. The Committee urged that the Library remain receptive to any such approaches, and that retrospective conversion of all or a part of the catalogs be listed among future goals.

4. Process Information System.

Because NOTIS is an integrated system, machine records exist for items before pieces are available. Many items appear before they are ordered. Although programs can be written to exclude "pre-cataloging" records from user indexes, many would be useful to patrons, and all such records must be available to staff. Presently it is not possible to tell explicitly where a piece is in the processing stream. When an individual item may take weeks to process, the difficulty of locating a work can be frustrating and/or time-consuming. The Committee did not feel that development of an in-process location system was urgent, but it noted the usefulness of such a mechanism and recommended that it occupy a place on the list of possible future system enhancements.

XII. CURRENT STATUS

In the year since the second Committee report was submitted a great deal has happened. Among major occurrences are the following:

1. Budgetary restraints have made not made it possible to fund a position for a Public Services-ISDO liaison, but a task force has been appointed to prepare a NOTIS 3 manual for staff use. An overall outline has been developed and several chapters have already been written, although progress has temporarily been halted to await impending significant system changes.
2. Final commitments on freezing or closing the catalogs are awaiting faculty concurrence, but plans for implementation are being made.
3. The Library's commitment to an on-line catalog appears strong, as the recent opening of the on-line pilot project attests.
4. Monetary considerations prohibit incorporating many additional categories of titles into the database, although NU dissertations are being input beginning in 1980, and a project to input corporate annual reports is more than half completed.
5. A tentative decision has been reached to continue filing purchased analytics to microform sets into the otherwise closed catalog.
6. Records for items received but not yet in the Catalog Department will display to users, but no message instructing patrons to request the piece at Circulation will be displayed.
7. MARC formats will accommodate data presently found on general and specific cross references and form cards, and the desirability of including this information in LUIS has been

recognized. The level of funding which can be allocated to authority conversion is minimal, but a special project currently underway should accomplish the partial conversion of approximately 70% of records in the main name authority file, and result in the availability of 40,000 to 45,000 references online by the beginning of Fall Quarter.

8. Specifications for a major redesign of the indexes are under review. The new design should alleviate most of the problems identified by the Committee, and will arrange for the display of cross references.

9. Many problem categories of records have received attention. Virtually all serial records, for example, are now on the database; an effort to delete duplicate records has left only a fraction of the original number in the file; programs to eliminate index entries filed under initial articles will soon be run; and a wide variety of other projects are scheduled for the coming months.

XIII. PREPARING FOR THE ONLINE CATALOG

Many types of activities are necessary to introduce the new catalog to users. Training has been largely handled through the ACCC, but publicity has been handled through administrative channels. The University Librarian has met with faculty committees and academic departments, articles have been published in the faculty and student Library newsletters, and a press release has been issued by the University. Meetings with faculty will continue, and it is likely that the Faculty Library Committee will be asked to make recommendations on the adoption and format of the new catalog. The first months of operations are crucial to LUIS's success. The enthusiastic participation of Library staff assisting users at the Information Desk will undoubtedly aid greatly in assuring its acceptance.

XIV. FUTURE OF THE ALTERNATIVES COMMITTEE

The coming year will see the Alternatives Committee continuing work, but the appearance of the on-line catalog as an operational reality signals that the time for leisured recommendations is past, and the need for decisions made through normal channels is increasing. A number of tasks remain for the Committee to complete, but plans are being made for its orderly dissolution. The first indication of this was seen in a recent staff announcement which directed that questions about LUIS, LCAT, LODR, and LCUS be referred to the appropriate persons in Public and Technical Services. The past two years have been

exciting for the Committee members, and none would wish not to have served. The emergence of the Library from a period of theory and recommendations into a period of practice and operations, however, is welcome, and the Committee is looking forward to the day when there will no longer be any question of what should be the Alternative to the Card Catalog.